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—THE TRIBUNE CREDO

INERTIA AS POLICY

On successive days we have heard the nondefinition of nonpolicy in foreign affairs from two of the principal spokesmen of the administration, President Johnson and Sen. J. William Fulbright, chairman of the foreign relations committee. The contributions of these gentlemen can be reduced to the thesis that the world is a mess, there is nothing we can do about it, and we might as well relax and enjoy it.

Mr. Johnson trotted out the familiar theme that "war is unthinkable." With thermonuclear weapons, he said, "general war is impossible and some alternatives are essential." The alternative that commended itself to him was "reasoned agreement."

War may be unthinkable to Mr. Johnson. Is it unthinkable to the Communists? We have heard the Peking branch of the conspiracy bawling for the incineration of the west. Apparently, war is not unthinkable to it. We have seen Khrushchev, with a pretense of moderation, restraining the impatient Chinese comrades with the counsel of "coexistence."

The lard-headed "liberals" think that he is preaching "live and let live." They do not tumble to the fact that "coexistence" is war by other means than atomic exchange, which, naturally, entails risks. The "liberals" do not appreciate the fact that Khrushchev is counting upon them to reduce the United States without bloodshed to impotence, when a walk-in communist conquest could be envisioned.

While the administration dwells upon the "unthinkable," the Communists keep chewing and biting at the periphery of freedom—silently, like rats at night. In southeast Asia they stand back while their auxiliaries do the dirty work. In Cuba they have triumphed under false pretenses by allowing the United States to provide the leverage in unseating a right-wing dictatorship and then allowing a left-wing tyranny to supplant it.

In Latin America and Africa the Communists are operating thru infiltration and subversion, with disguised agents installed in high places and with fifth columns and guerrilla formations in reserve until the hour is right.

Our bemused leaders don't know what to do about it or how to handle the worldwide threat. They act like men encased in a large and enveloping burlap sack groping aimlessly in the dark for an adversary who always eludes the touch.

So Mr. Johnson falls back on "reason" as a means of dealing with an unreasonable enemy whose end of reducing the world to universal despotism is entirely irrational but whose means of accomplishing that end are completely rational—and effective. The President laves himself in rhetoric and talks of Isaiah. Isaiah is not presiding over the Kremlin.

Sen. Fulbright's prescription, he admits, is "distasteful." We must recognize, he says, that Castro is here to stay. So we must abandon the pretense of a trade embargo and start dealing with him. In Panama, we must renegotiate the treaty which for 60 years has given the United States control "as if it were sovereign" over the canal. We must renegotiate this instrument to the satisfaction of the wealthy oligarchy which rules Panama and pockets the dollars, even tho it is the dispossessed masses, susceptible to communist incitements and manipulation, which jeopardize our hold on the waterway.

In Viet Nam Sen. Fulbright's ideal is, apparently, another Korea. We are to support the South Vietnamese, who have little disposition to fight and no desire to win, but we are not to extend the war to the privileged sanctuary of communist North Viet Nam, for that might stir up trouble.

We spend 50 billion dollars a year on military power and are, so the President says, the most powerful nation on earth, but we must never move our troops or invoke our power, for somebody might be killed. Meanwhile, the Communists sweep piece after piece from the board. It could be that the United States will go down in history as a nation which was defeated tho its power was unimpaired, because never used.